

Maria Rolnikaite And Her Husband At The Society For Jews - War Veterans



This photograph was taken in 2003 in St. Petersburg. Till now I often deliver retrospecting lectures.

On the Victory day [11](#) I was invited to speak at a meeting of two generations. The hall was divided into two parts: the former citizens of the besieged Leningrad [12](#) and the former prisoners on the one side and schoolchildren on the other one. The presenter asked me to prepare autographed copies of my books for the schoolchildren. They were sorry to have bought only 5 books (there were no more books in the bookshop!). Then I addressed the audience with my story (and you know that each recollection is painful)... They asked me many questions, including the following one 'What's your attitude towards young generation?' And I answered 'I rest my hopes upon them.' The whole room applauded.

In Petersburg there is an Association of the Former Minor Prisoners of Concentration Camps. Its members started to receive amends from Germany. Last year (in the beginning of August) 10 former prisoners from Moscow and 10 ones from Petersburg were invited to visit Germany. But you see, it was only me who spoke to people everywhere in Germany. Among the members of our group there were different people: one of them knew nothing, another one was too little to recollect anything. And I was an experienced speaker: under the Soviet regime they used to invite me to different factories, and I spoke to people readily (I knew that I had to). I also was a member of a Circle for Propagation of the Soviet Literature. The word propagation frightens people, but actually the circle arranged meetings of writers and their readers.

Someone said for a joke that in the Union of Soviet Writers there were hundreds of Jews, but only one Jewess.

In France (in 2003) I received a special prize In Memory of Holocaust, signed by Rothschild. He had to deliver a speech, but unfortunately that day hooligans set fire to a synagogue somewhere in the suburb. Therefore we did not meet (unfortunately!) and Rothschild sent me the text of his speech

translated into Russian. There he wrote that that premium had been awarded since 1998 once a year, and for the first time in its history it was awarded to a person from the country which was on its way to democratic society.

It's interesting to mention that I have four different surnames as an author of those books. According to my passport I am Rolnikayte, in Israel (in Hebrew) and in Warsaw (in Yiddish) they called me Rolnik. In Paris they knew my uncle (there is a memorial plaque built into the wall of the house where he lived), therefore I was called there Rolnikas (to show our relationship). You know Maria Rolnikas in Lithuanian means just the same as Maria Ivanov - a woman's variant of the first name plus a man's variant of the surname. And in Czechoslovakia they transformed my surname into Rolnikassova. Hence I have 4 surnames as a real criminal! Erenburg [14](#) was the first person, who asked me about my first name when I visited him: he thought I was Miriam. And it was my sister whose name was Miriam. When I asked Daddy about my first name, he explained that when Mom was pregnant, she dreamed to give birth to a boy. At that time my father's grandfather died and my father's father asked him to call the newborn boy Moshele. Therefore when a girl was born, they called her (me) Masha (Maria). All was very simple and very complicated at the same time!

At present I am a member of the Society for War Veterans, Former Citizens of the Besieged Leningrad and Ghetto Prisoners and also a member of the Association of the Former Minor Prisoners of Concentration Camps. There we celebrate Jewish holidays. Besides that I use to celebrate anniversaries of our liberation from fascist concentration camp. When the date (March 10) is near, it comes to my mind again and again. I recollect our long walk to the camp, and the soldier pushing me down into the ditch, and a very strong wind. I remember that I wanted to fall asleep and be sleeping like a log till the end of those terrible days. You know, to tell the truth, all my terrible memoirs will stay with me for ever ...